Edsel B. Ford II
Michigan State Legislature
Stem Cell Research Statement
Lansing, Wednesday, November 7, 2007

Chairman Paul Condino, and members of the House Judiciary Committee, thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me today.

I'm here today in a couple of capacities. You probably know me as the great-grandson of Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company. Our family and the Ford Motor Company have been involved over the years in a number of initiatives that have directly benefited the people of Michigan. That is a tradition that was begun in 1915, when my great-grandfather founded Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. Today, I'm proud to continue that tradition in a wide range of cultural, community and medical arenas.

What you might not know, though, is that I am the father of a child afflicted with Type 1 or juvenile diabetes. My son, Albert, is a bright, energetic and extremely personable young man. It is a great source of anguish to my wife and me that, after decades of medical investigation in this field, juvenile diabetes remains a condition for which there is no known cure.

There is, however, tremendous hope – and one of the brightest spots of hope lies in the field of embryonic stem cell research.

Among the myriad types of cells in the human body, stem cells are unique in that they can not only renew themselves – they can differentiate into different sorts of cells. This means they can be used to repair the body at the cellular level. Bone marrow transplants for the treatment of leukemia are one example of the use of adult stem cells to successfully treat disease.

But embryonic stem cells hold even more promise than adult stem cells because the embryonic cells can be grown and transformed into pretty much any of the cells that make up a human being. Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni, director of the National Institutes of Health, has stated publicly that embryonic stem cell research holds more potential than research conducted solely with adult cells.

The regeneration of spinal cord tissue for young athletes injured on the playing field … the repair of muscle damage … the treatment of Parkinson's Disease – the disease that afflicts the actor Michael J. Fox ... all of these are areas in which embryonic stem cell research has great positive potential.

And, very close to home for my family and me, embryonic stem cell research is currently one of the greatest hopes in the search for a cure for juvenile diabetes.

California, New York, Wisconsin, Connecticut and Illinois are states that currently lead the nation in research in this critical field. And if you are wondering where Michigan is on that list … Michigan is nowhere at all. That's because Michigan has some of the most restrictive laws in the nation when it comes to embryonic stem cell research. Doctors run the risk of up to a ten-million-dollar fine and ten years in prison, if they attempt to conduct the same sort of research that is both legal and encouraged in many other countries, and many other states.

Embryonic stem cells for research are obtained from two principle sources. The first are embryos grown for fertility treatment. When no longer needed, these cells are generally destroyed. They literally become medical waste.

The second source of embryonic stem cells is a process called Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer. This process creates patient-specific embryonic stem cell lines. Some people oppose SCNT because they feel the process could be used to clone a human being. Using SCNT to try and clone a human being is and will remain illegal. However, using SCNT to create embryonic stem cells that can be used to treat disease should be permitted. That is what this legislation would do.

Those are the facts. And when presented with the actual facts behind embryonic stem cell research … when apprised that it uses materials that would otherwise be wasted, or a technique that is, in and of itself, medically benign, survey after survey shows that the vast majority of Americans *support* regulated embryonic stem cell research.

So the only obstacles to this critical research are fears born out of myth and ignorance. And that's a shame.

Imagine that you have a loved one or a family member who is drowning. Imagine someone nearby has a life preserver, but is prevented from throwing it to them because of a law borne out of distorted information and myth. If you can get that picture in your head, then you can sense some of the profound frustration I feel when I discuss this subject. The laws against embryonic stem cell research are an unnecessary hurdle for the doctors and scientists in our medical community.

There is a dollars-and-cents side to this argument as well. When Michigan closes the door to embryonic stem cell research, we effectively tell those companies and technologies on the cutting edge in this field to go elsewhere. That should weigh in your decision as well. But for me, that consideration is a distant second. I'm here today for the life of my son, and for the lives of millions like him.

Michigan is at a crossroads today. Do we open the door of hope for people challenged by illness and injury? Do we open the door to investors and biotic companies that could infuse our state economy with badly needed income? Do we do what many other state governments have already decided to do, both here in the Midwest on both the East and West Coasts? Or do we continue to yield to unfounded fear and continue to place unwarranted obstacles in the path of some of the brightest minds in the medical field today?

As a businessman, I urge you to consider that question with your heads. And as a father, I *beg* you to consider that question with your hearts.

Please – open the door to regulated embryonic stem cell research in the State of Michigan. Our state needs it. Our people need it.

Thank you.

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